



think an independent prosecutor might be appropriate."

The Senate report is one of four major independent reviews of the Bush administration's conduct in the BNL affair.

CIA Inspector General Frederick P. Hitz, in a report also released yesterday, declared he found no evidence that CIA officials had deliberately withheld information from the Justice Department to obstruct the prosecution or keep the agency from becoming implicated in the BNL affair.

But Hitz added that "mistakes clearly were made by agency officers in their handling of events related to the BNL matter, and there was carelessness and a number of instances of poor judgment." He recommended disciplinary action against four individuals. But in a written reply released yesterday, former CIA director Robert M. Gates rejected Hitz's recommendation before leaving office last month.

Neither the Senate nor internal CIA studies support the allegations in a separate report last October by U.S. District Judge Marvin H. Shoob, who was then presiding over the BNL case, that the Bush admin-

istration failed "to investigate seriously" whether Rome officials knew of the loans because it wanted to "contain criticism of a failed foreign policy" toward Iraq before the Persian Gulf War.

That claim was also rebuffed by a special investigator appointed by the Justice Department who concluded last December that political considerations had not tainted the government's handling of the probe, but called the handling of classified information in the case "a fiasco."

Senate sources said the intelligence committee staff had based its conclusions about the lack of U.S. government complicity in the loans on assurances it received from officials of the CIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency, as well as on classified documents it reviewed—none of which, the report said, supported charges of a government-wide conspiracy.

The sources acknowledged that the staff did not conduct an independent inquiry into leads provided by the classified documents, which prevented it from reaching a conclusion about whether Drogoul was solely responsible for the loans.